

Hannah Johnson, *Stillwater Gazette*

Support for a new bridge over the St. Croix River is heating up.

So is opposition to the proposed span.

New legislation, with bipartisan support, emerged last week from Sen. Amy Klobuchar that would allow a new crossing over the St. Croix River. Klobuchar's legislation also received support from Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.), Sen. Herb Kohl (D-Wis) and Sen. Roh Johnson (R-Wis.).

U.S. Rep. Michele Bachman (R-Minn.) released a statement last Friday commending Klobuchar and Franken for their support of a new St. Croix bridge.

"This important legislation brings a needed St. Croix River Crossing closer to becoming a reality for the residents of Minnesota and Wisconsin," Bachmann said.

Bachmann wasn't the only politician singing praises for the senators' move. Stillwater Mayor Ken Harycki said the bipartisan support for the bridge was "groundbreaking" and one of the most significant steps toward building a new St. Croix River crossing.

"These are very important steps and developments, but now the challenge is for citizens who want to see a bridge be built they need to come together and form a unified voice," Harycki said.

In response to the new legislation, U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) also issued a statement that said the new proposal would authorize a freeway-style bridge that is currently prohibited by the National Park Service since it violates the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

"This mega-bridge legislation is a fiscally irresponsible bipartisan plan that creates a transportation nightmare for residents along Minnesota Highway 36," McCollum said in her statement. "Its language ignores much less expensive bridge options that meet the needs of Stillwater residents and comply with federal law."

The Sierra Club's Minnesota North Star Chapter said it was "disappointed that Sen. Klobuchar has introduced this bill." The group said it still opposed the massive bridge design that "taxpayers on both sides of the river cannot afford."

Joshua Houdek, the land use and transportation program manager for the Sierra Club, said the group is still trying to figure out the implications of the new legislation, particularly looking at what kind of precedent this will set.

"We're extremely concerned on a national level for all scenic and natural rivers," Houdek said.

Houdek said the Sierra Club supports a "sensible Stillwater bridge design" that is affordable for people on both sides of the river.